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## THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU<sup>1</sup>

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On April 9 of the present year, the President of the United States approved the act creating the Children's Bureau under the Department of Commerce and Labor. The efforts that led up to this accomplished fact may be briefly reviewed as follows:

Five years ago the idea of a Federal Children's Bureau originated with Miss Lillian D. Wald, head of the Nurses' Settlement in New York. Mrs. Florence Kelley, secretary of the National Consumers' League, a former resident of Hull House now living at the Nurses' Settlement, drew up the first outline of the matters relating to child-care which should be intrusted to the proposed bureau for investigation—an outline corresponding closely with the enumeration of subjects contained in the law finally enacted. The genuine value of a genuine settlement is thus evidenced by the fact that this bureau was first urged by women who have lived long in settlements and who by that experience have learned to know as well as any persons in this country certain aspects of dumb misery which they desired through some governmental agency to make articulate and intelligible. They urged upon the National Child Labor Committee the possibility of undertaking a publicity campaign on behalf of such a bureau and that organization has for four years maintained an office in Washington, and, by wise and patient effort, has aroused and organized the public interest which has been an all-important factor in securing the law, so that no piece of governmental machinery ever went into operation with more harmonious and vigorous backing from public-spirited men and women.

The National Child Labor Committee took the lead only to bring together effectively the great associations interested in such

<sup>1</sup> Being an address before the Biennial Meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, San Francisco, July 5, 1912.

an enactment and eager to urge the law. These associations represent, as was constantly admitted during the long debate in Congress, the most influential and the wisest views in this country on the care and protection of children. If the Bureau can continue to have their aid it cannot fail of usefulness and it will escape a danger which has been repeatedly mentioned; namely, the possibility that a federal bureau will relieve local bodies and volunteer associations of the sense of responsibility, will centralize the activities on behalf of children, and cool the ardor of those who would otherwise care tenderly and probably wisely for individual children. A distant office in Washington, filled with government employees, whose business it is to know about children, to gather and classify facts about them, instead of doing things for them, must make a constant effort likewise to avoid the faults of academic methods and aims. It is because my superiors at Washington wish this bureau to be vital, co-operative, serving the needs of the whole country, arousing rather than dulling the sense of personal responsibility, stimulating rather than usurping the functions of states and cities and counties and of volunteer associations, that I am here tonight.

Already the organization of the Bureau has begun. Under the strictest interpretation of the federal civil service law, as well as with the realization that no government agency can ever need more than this one will the steadying precision of statistical accuracy, two important appointments have been made. The assistant chief is Mr. Lewis Meriam, a Harvard graduate, for six years employed in the Census Bureau, where he steadily advanced from a minor clerkship to the headship of a division. The chief statistician is Mr. Ethelbert Stewart, long identified with the Bureau of Labor, later with the Tariff Board, and known as a statistical expert and a field investigator of the highest class. The private secretary of the chief of the Bureau, although excepted by law from the civil service requirements, has been selected on the same basis of personal fitness. The final appointment of the other members of the present staff must await definite decision as to the precise work to be undertaken for this first year.

The Bureau needs, as has been said, the sternest statistical accuracy at base because its appeal to the noblest human passion of

pity must never be founded upon anything but truth, because it must guard against the easy charge of sentimentality and must be able to present all its statements dispassionately with scientific candor and faithfulness. In order that neither time nor money be wasted in repetition or duplication one of the most important positions which will be created in the Bureau will be that of a librarian-reader who will scan the current literature of the world and who can not only interpret the principal modern languages but estimate the social importance of the various movements relating to children. Such a position will require fine linguistic attainments, training in social science, a special interest in the work of the Bureau, as well as the usual knowledge of a trained librarian.

Before submitting for consideration specific suggestions of a fundamental character, attention should be given to the words of the law in which the duties of the Federal Children's Bureau are prescribed.

The first clause is comprehensive: "The said Bureau shall investigate and report to said department upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people."<sup>\*</sup> The next clauses are more specific: "and shall

<sup>\*</sup> The full text of the law is as follows:

An Act To establish in the Department of Commerce and Labor a bureau to be known as the Children's Bureau.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That there shall be established in the Department of Commerce and Labor a bureau to be known as the Children's Bureau.

SEC. 2. That the said bureau shall be under the direction of a chief, to be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and who shall receive an annual compensation of five thousand dollars. The said bureau shall investigate and report to said department upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people, and shall especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth-rate, orphanage, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children, employment, legislation affecting children in the several states and territories. But no official, or agent, or representative of said bureau shall, over the objection of the head of the family, enter any house used exclusively as a family residence. The chief of said bureau may from time to time publish the results of these investigations in such manner and to such extent as may be prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce and Labor.

SEC. 3. That there shall be in said bureau, until otherwise provided for by law, an assistant chief, to be appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and Labor, who shall receive an annual compensation of two thousand four hundred dollars; one private secretary to the chief of the bureau, who shall receive an annual compensation of one thousand five hundred dollars; one statistical expert, at two thousand dollars; two clerks of class four; two clerks of class three; one clerk of class two; one clerk of class one; one clerk, at one thousand dollars; one copyist, at nine hundred dollars; one

especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth-rate, orphanage, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children, employment, legislation affecting children in the several states and territories." It is plain that such sweeping powers must be very carefully used if they are not to result in costly waste. The next paragraph of the law defines the number of the employees at fifteen and the statutory expenses at \$25,640 a year. Small as this equipment appears, there could easily be waste of labor, and consequently of money; but here is seen the practical value of the federal civil service law which, permitting the choice of appointees on the basis of personal merit alone, is a protection against the wasteful appointments which thirty years ago would inevitably have been made. Indeed, it is well to recall the fact that such a bureau, requiring for real efficiency a staff composed of persons highly qualified and absolutely devoted to their work as a career, is only possible because there is a federal civil service law.

In the preparation of a program for the work of the first year, the fact has been brought out in a striking manner that the various bureaus of the government already possess an enormous amount of information with reference to child life which has been obtained at great cost and by the expenditure of large sums, but which is too detailed and technical for use by the general reader. There are likewise great private foundations carrying on studies regarding various phases of the life of children. For example, the Russell Sage Foundation is devoting a large sum annually to the study of children in institutions, the American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality has undertaken a campaign to reduce the waste of infant life, and the work of the National Child Labor Committee directed against the industrial exploitation of children is familiar to all.

Those responsible for the work of the Bureau believe, therefore,

special agent, at one thousand four hundred dollars; one special agent, at one thousand two hundred dollars, and one messenger at eight hundred and forty dollars.

SEC. 4. That the Secretary of Commerce and Labor is hereby directed to furnish sufficient quarters for the work of this bureau at an annual rental not to exceed two thousand dollars.

SEC. 5. That this Act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Approved, April 9, 1912.

that a careful survey of the field is its first duty. They think it proper that this task should precede original work on the part of the Bureau itself, and they therefore hope to present, in the form of brief, readable monographs, material now available or shortly to become so, originally too detailed and technical for the use of the lay reader. They are ready to accept the function of popularizing the wisdom of others and wherever such wisdom exists their own highest wisdom consists first of all in making that available.

If the subjects especially mentioned in the bill are now recalled it will be seen that certain of them have to do with the physical existence of the child—mortality, the birth-rate, disease, physical degeneracy. Questions of the birth-rate and of infant mortality, that is, death-rate of children less than one year old, whose fundamental importance and relevancy cannot be exaggerated, are wisely placed first. The great English statistician, Dr. Arthur Newsholme, has said:

Infant mortality is the most sensitive index we possess of social welfare. *If babies were well born and well cared for, their mortality would be negligible.* The infant death-rate measures the intelligence, health, and right living of fathers and mothers, the standards of morals and sanitation of communities and governments, the efficiency of physicians, nurses, health officers and educators.

And Professor Dietrich, the great German authority, is responsible for the statement:

It was formerly believed that the rate of mortality among children who had not reached the first anniversary of their birth was a wise dispensation of nature intended to prevent children with a weak constitution becoming too plentiful. Today we know that a great infant mortality is a national disaster—on the one hand because numerous economic values are created without purpose and prematurely destroyed and on the other hand because the causes of the high rate of infant mortality affect the powers of resistance of the other infants, and weaken the strength of the nation in its next generation.

The United States census of 1910 discloses the fact that in that year in the registration area 154,373 babies died when less than one year old. Moreover we are told on the authority of Dr. Cressy L. Wilbur, Chief Statistician of the United States Census Bureau, that the lives of at least one-half of these babies could have been saved by the application of methods which are within the reach of every community.

It will be noted figures are used for the "registration area" only.<sup>1</sup> What does that mean? It means that figures are to be obtained for about one-half of the area of the United States only, and that the Census Bureau must estimate the facts for the rest of the country by those recorded in the registration states. On the basis of such an estimate, the number of babies under one year of age dying yearly in the whole United States is stated conservatively as 200,000. Can a more satisfying purpose be conceived than that

<sup>1</sup> The "registration area" comprises such states as have "laws of a suitable character and are sufficiently well enforced to insure at least approximately correct returns and includes in addition certain cities in nonregistration states in which statistics of deaths are collected under effective local ordinances."

The states included in this "registration area" in 1910 were: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina (municipalities of 1,000 and over in 1900), Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

There are 43 cities in nonregistration states which enter into the registration area. These are:

<i>Alabama:</i>	<i>Kansas:</i>	<i>South Carolina:</i>
Birmingham	Kansas City	Charleston
Mobile	Leavenworth	
Montgomery	Wichita	<i>Tennessee:</i>
		Knoxville
<i>Delaware:</i>	<i>Kentucky:</i>	Memphis
Wilmington	Covington	Nashville
	Louisville	
<i>Florida:</i>	Newport	<i>Texas:</i>
Jacksonville	Paducah	Galveston
Key West		San Antonio
	<i>Louisiana:</i>	
<i>Georgia:</i>	New Orleans	<i>Virginia:</i>
Atlanta		Alexandria
Savannah	<i>Missouri:</i>	Danville
	Kansas City	Lynchburg
<i>Illinois:</i>	St. Joseph	Norfolk
Aurora	St. Louis	Petersburg
Belleville		Richmond
Chicago	<i>Nebraska:</i>	
Decatur	Lincoln	<i>West Virginia:</i>
Evanston	Omaha	Wheeling
Jacksonville		
Quincy	<i>Oregon:</i>	
Springfield	Portland	

This "registration area" contained 58.3 per cent of the population of continental United States estimated as of July 1, 1910. It must not be forgotten that this is a death "registration area" and not birth registration. In very few of the states of the United States is there kept a record of births that can be considered even approximately complete or accurate.

of saving the 100,000 babies who are now lost plainly by our careless neglect, unless it be to learn to reduce the number to that "negligible" minimum of which Dr. Newsholme speaks?

But if there is uncertainty as to the number of deaths, there is still greater ignorance as to the number of children born. For not a single state, not a single city, has complete registration of births. In the words of Dr. Durand, head of the Census Bureau: "It is certainly both strange and shameful that the United States should be so far behind the other leading countries of the world in the registration of deaths and even more so in the registration of births."

In a pamphlet prepared by the Bureau of the Census, 1910,<sup>1</sup> it is stated roundly: "The most utterly worthless registration of births among all the great cities of the entire civilized world may be claimed by the cities of Baltimore, Chicago, and New Orleans," and San Francisco probably deserves the shameful honor of taking place as the fourth on equal terms with this disgraceful trio.

There are, of course, reasons why America lags behind European countries in the matter of noting the births of children. One reason is that the United States have not resorted to one expedient, the sternest, most hateful in all the world, by which at once faultless birth registration might be secured. Reference is made to the expedient which renders registration imperative in the great military countries. This expedient is the establishment of conscription and a standing army. God forbid that this country should ever count its children to the cruel and wasteful end of war!

But has peace no reasons for knowing authoritatively the advent of every citizen? Are not human lives in a civilization of peace worth enough each in turn to be dignified by such public record as shall preserve each precious link in the human chain?

Certainly property rights can often be economically and justly preserved only by the registration of births. Picturesque and tragic instances of the loss of property rights due to lack of birth registration could be cited; but a humorous and cheerful incident

<sup>1</sup> "Explanatory List of Diagrams Relating to Deaths of Infants," prepared for the annual meeting and exhibit of the American Association for Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality, Baltimore, 1910.—Bureau of the Census, Washington, 1910.



will make clear the point. Dr. John N. Hurty, secretary of the Indiana State Board of Health, tells the following story:

A farmer of Indiana, dying, left his valuable farm in trust to his unthrifty son, to go to his granddaughter on her twenty-first birthday. The girl had been told the date of her birth and always celebrated as her birthday the annual recurrence of the same. However, when she believed she was twenty-one, and claimed her inheritance, her father denied her age, saying she was only nineteen. The family bible was appealed to, but the leaf with the record was gone. The court was in a quandary. At last a neighbor remembered that a valuable cow, belonging to the grandfather, had given birth to a calf on the day the girl was born, and he could swear to the coincidence. Perhaps the grandfather had recorded the date of the birth of the calf. His farm books showed this to be the case, and the date of birth of the human being was established.

And in this connection one should remember Bernard Shaw's warning to novelists against the *deus ex machina* dénouement; for grandfathers in real life cannot be depended upon to keep herds of cattle.

Perhaps the most immediate necessity for birth registration in this country at the present time makes itself felt in connection with the effort to secure to every child his share of education and to protect him from premature and unguarded entry into working life. Mr. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, says in his annual report for 1910: "If laws providing for a free and happy childhood and the prevention of the ills which follow from the employment of children under legal age are to be enforced, there should be the means of obtaining evidence of age beyond doubt." Such evidence can of course be obtained by nothing short of birth registration.

Florence Kelley has epitomized the treatment of the child labor problem in saying that the best child labor law is a compulsory education law. It is certainly true that even if the children could be kept from working in factories, or working anywhere, the state has done less than half its duty toward them. It must in self-defense provide schools in which both mental and physical powers are enlarged, so that it is plain to parents that the child and the family are alike benefited by the postponement of the working age.

A tiny boy came into a hotel and asked a lady to buy a paper.

When she exclaimed, "Why! how old are you? Why aren't you in school?" this merchant, a recognized legal trader in most of our states, replied: "I am five years old. I am not old enough to go to school."

Many illustrations of the need of dovetailing these two kinds of law could in fact be drawn from any state, especially from any one of those states in which, in some localities, the 1910 census figures show that the school attendance of children from six to fourteen years is as low as 54.6 per cent.

Let me submit an example of this need of dovetailing, from surroundings with which I am personally familiar, the nineteenth ward of Chicago. I shall venture upon some detail because the instance relates to various subjects mentioned in the law.

An Italian family, father, mother, and eight children, survived the Messina earthquake and came to the United States. The father had been buried in the débris for several days before his rescue, and the horror of his imprisonment had almost turned his mind. When he first came over he was always thinking that the walls were coming in on him. Hull House first knew them when they applied for help a year and a half ago, stating that the oldest child, Chiara, who they said was nearly sixteen years old, was out of work because of the garment workers' strike then on in Chicago. The father was also out of work. Milk for the baby was bought on credit. They were trying to get a work certificate for the second girl, Giovanna, alleged to be fourteen years old, who was deaf and apparently subnormal, but the certificate was refused, and the child went back to school. Several months later the parents again tried to secure a work certificate for Giovanna, and then the district office of the Chicago United Charities wrote to Messina asking for birth records and received a prompt reply from the city hall of Messina, with a copy of the record which had undergone the earthquake. Chiara was born April 10, 1898, Giovanna was born on November 5, 1899, said the Sicilian record. Accordingly it became evident that the older girl was not yet fourteen, although she had been at work two years, and that the younger girl was twelve, instead of fourteen as the parents claimed.

Little Giovanna was thus captured for education, and, in the

hope of making her better able to learn, her tonsils were removed, and her deafness treated, and she has been returned for the two years' schooling which the compulsory education law and the child labor law of Illinois agreed in giving her.

Poor Chiara, convicted of being under fourteen, found her work certificate confiscated and herself returned to school by the compulsory education department; but she came to Hull House in the evening, saying she could not go to school with such small children, she, a "great big girl and would be married soon."

The mother too says Hull House ladies are "dreaming" to send a girl so old to school. If the Chicago public school and the Illinois factory inspection had utilized the Sicilian birth registration, Chiara would not have gone to work at twelve. She would instead have had two years for learning English and the art of keeping house in American fashion now so effectively taught in the lower grades of the best city schools. She might have worked for better wages the two years from fourteen to sixteen, and might have married at the remote age of sixteen without too much reproach from the Italian colony.

This is not the place for discussing the chaotic social economy shown by this story, for defending these parents from the easy but unjust charge of desiring to exploit their young daughters; but the case of little Giovanna turns us back to the item in the law relating to "defective children." How many dull or subnormal little girls and boys are thus lagging behind in school? No one knows. How can they be dealt with, in justice to themselves and their brighter and stronger brothers and sisters? Who knows? How far do they become the charges of a juvenile court? How far can they live self-directing lives as adults? No one can tell, although in New York and Chicago and elsewhere, these neglected problems are beginning to receive the attention they demand.

Since I have received the honor of appointment as chief of the Children's Bureau I have sought advice from all the people I could meet who have been interested in the Bureau or who are especially interested in the subject of the working children of this country. Many of those with whom I have counseled have warned me against making prominent the subject of child labor. They have said to

me that it is not a popular subject and that inquiries into the conditions of working children might cause prejudice against the Bureau among powerful people. This advice I know has been given disinterestedly. On the other hand, I have watched carefully the voluminous correspondence which has come to me and I find expressed so frequently the sense of wrong to the child and to the nation in permitting children to work during the years when conservative compulsory education states provide schooling for them, that I am sure this bureau will not be allowed without popular protest to ignore the child at work.

At present, as I have tried to say, there is a store of knowledge to be popularized; there are plans to be evolved for making the Bureau promptly responsive to popular demands for any relevant information, and there are fundamental propositions affecting every human being in the nation to be set out.

The registration of births seems to many of us the most imminent of these last:

To know anything about the birth-rate, we must register the children born.

To know anything about the death-rate, we must register the children born as well as the children who die.

To know how to stop the loss of 200,000 infants yearly, we must know first why they die, and when and where. We must register their births and deaths as the essential element of intelligent life-saving.

To know when the nation's children are entitled to attend school, we must know their ages by legal record.

To know when children can work legally, we must have legal certainty as to their birthdays.

To know about the diseases of children, we must register births and deaths.

All these are subjects which the Bureau is directed to study. Hence it is evident that vital statistics regarding children are essential to its work, and that an appeal to the members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs for their co-operation in securing vital statistics of this character is justified. Within twelve months the members of this great organization could secure

for this country effective birth and death records. The federal government cannot do this but the women could. Those who are proud of a long ancestry could learn if the births of their children are registered in the town where they were born; three in every four who looked for such records would find none. Yet family physicians would unfailingly register every new-born child if the parents requested it. However, of course, legislation is needed, and it is of interest that Virginia has just passed a model registration law.<sup>1</sup>

The question has been asked if there could be a more satisfying task than that of saving the lives of 100,000 babies every year. Some may think it a more satisfying aim to make certain the welfare of those same children and of every living child. It is only a satisfying ambition to save life if we can see that health, education, recreation, work are all duly secured and harmonized to serve the true ends of life.

Where should a humble beginning be made to share afresh in this splendid task? Should one not begin with the expedient of securing registration of births and deaths? An affirmative answer has been already made by the adoption of a resolution, asking the Children's Bureau to prepare in brief popular form material to be used in securing proper registration of births and deaths in the large part of the United States where such records are neglected.

This resolution shows the spirit of co-operation which the Bureau needs. As soon as possible after the appropriation<sup>2</sup> which will enable the Bureau to begin work becomes available, it will comply faithfully with that request.

Evidently not all the subjects enumerated in this measure can be discussed thoroughly here. Some of the most urgent and important have not been mentioned. Nor am I able to present, save in the general terms I have employed, the plan of work of this new and unorganized bureau. We hope to be able as soon as possible to serve as a directory and bureau of information, and we shall welcome inquiries upon subjects within our scope and will do our best to answer them. We shall welcome advice. We will take it if we can.

<sup>1</sup> Approved March 12, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> The appropriation became available August 23, 1912.

And now lastly, in what spirit shall this service be performed? I have said that it must be done so as to be a stimulus and not a sedative to fresh-springing local action; but how? I think there is only one way. It must be done in a way to respect and to express the spirit of parenthood, not motherhood alone nor fatherhood alone, but parenthood. There will then be no risk of undue interference, no danger of overbearing agents forcing their way into homes over parental protest, as has been feared.

Not long ago in a meeting of delegates of many great foreign societies representing hundreds of thousands of recent immigrants, one of them rose to speak. He represented a race commonly accounted especially dull and ignorant. He told simply of the legal oppression which had for generations condemned his people to ignorance, he told how eagerly they came here because of the freedom and the chance for education, and he said, with an unconscious eloquence almost matchless in my experience, "I am a fader, and like every fader I want my child to go higher than me."

I think of the long line of immigrant fathers and mothers on American soil since the beginning of the wonderful seventeenth century and I realize that at bottom he spoke the common reason for their coming. The parents who came in the cabin of the "Mayflower" and those who sank in the steerage of the "Titanic" had the same profound impulse.

If this bureau serves the aspiration of that universal cry of human parenthood, if it really serves democracy, it will survive and grow. If not, it will perish, for that cry is as old and strong as time, as fresh and inevitable as tomorrow. That cry will be heard and will be served somehow, voicing as it does the invincible slow progress of humanity upward.